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JACK ANDERSON

Polish Regime Showing Signs Of Unraveling

Intelligence analysts say the threadbare military regime of Poland's Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski may be coming apart at the seams. Secret intelligence assessments suggest that the Polish army is showing signs of serious strain.

Here is some of the evidence on which the analysts base their conclusions:

- In the violent suppression of recent demonstrations, security police have done the dirty work, while the army stayed on the sidelines. As in other communist countries, security forces are likely to be more ruthless and dedicated to the regime, whether from self-interest or ideology. But the anti-government riptides in Poland make it doubtful if security police can control the population; sooner or later, the communists will have to call on the army.

- The army, however, may be unreliable. In fact, a number of military men were spotted in the ranks of the Solidarity union demonstrators, protesting the martial law they are supposed to be enforcing.

- The Polish army appears to be

suffering a shortage of officers. Winning a military commission used to be highly competitive, and entrance examinations were tough. But in recent weeks the armed services have virtually dropped their entrance examinations, taking just about anybody they can lure off the street. Intelligence analysts interpret this as a direct result of the widespread bitterness against the military since the imposition of martial law.

- In the lower ranks, which have none of the prestige and perks of commissioned officers, the situation may be even more ominous for the Polish regime. The customary two-year term for conscripts was extended last fall, according to intelligence sources. When martial law was decreed in December, the length of service was extended once again.

The new recruits may be a different story, though. They are young men who were impressionable teenagers during the Solidarity ferment of the last couple of years. Drafted from factories, shipyards and universities, many of them were members of Solidarity; ordering them to crush their friends and co-workers could be a risky proposition.

- Once held in high esteem by their fellow countrymen, members of the armed forces are increasingly viewed with suspicion. This has created a serious morale problem among officers and men, and a corresponding resentment of a regime

that transformed them from heroes into oppressors, intelligence sources told my associate Lucette Lagnado.

It is a tragic irony of the Polish situation that the cracks in Poland's military machine may lead to disaster, not just for Jaruzelski and his fellow generals, but for the entire nation.

The sad reality remains basically what it was when the democratic "excesses" of the Solidarity movement led to the declaration of martial law five months ago today. Indeed, the reality is the same as it has been for the last 38 years: the Soviets are ready, willing and able to descend on Poland in overwhelming force if the military loses control of the situation.

The Kremlin may have mellowed a bit since Joseph Stalin's bloody era, but postwar Soviet leaders have never shown any compunctions about striking ruthlessly when their communist empire's vital interests are threatened. It's no secret that they consider Poland a key part of that empire.

Throughout history, the Poles have shown a hunger for freedom that often bordered on the suicidal. Polish lancers charged Nazi tanks and machine guns with incredible courage—and little else. Whether their descendants will decide to settle for the grim but survivable oppression of martial law is not at all clear.